

# Investigating the effects of emotion regulation and creativity on Chinese EFL teachers' burnout in online classes

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**ABSTRACT:** The spread of the Coronavirus and the emergence of new technology have led to an abrupt shift in education and changed the mode of instruction. The new mode of instruction has faced teachers with new challenges, which may enhance the rate of job burnout. To avoid this phenomenon, the causes of teacher burnout in online classes should be widely identified. With this in mind, this inquiry investigated the effects of emotion regulation and creativity on EFL teachers' burnout in online classes. We hypothesized that teachers' creativity and ability to regulate their emotions can minimize the rate of burnout. To test this hypothesis, 329 Chinese EFL teachers were invited to respond to three validated questionnaires. The collected data were analysed through Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The study outcomes revealed a significant correlation between Chinese EFL teachers' creativity, emotion regulation, and burnout. The results also showed that creativity and emotion regulation can make a significant change in the rate of teacher burnout. The present results are hoped to be illuminating for all online English teachers.

**Keywords:** burnout, Emotion regulation, Creativity, EFL teachers, Online classrooms, Chinese EFL context

## **Investigar los efectos de la regulación emocional y la creatividad en el agotamiento de los profesores chinos de EFL en clases en línea**

**RESUMEN:** La extensión del Coronavirus y la aparición de la nueva tecnología han conducido a un cambio abrupto en la educación y han cambiado el modo de la instrucción. El nuevo modo de instrucción ha enfrentado a los maestros con nuevos desafíos, lo que puede aumentar la tasa de agotamiento laboral. Para evitar este fenómeno, las causas del agotamiento del profesorado en las clases online deberían ser ampliamente identificadas. Con esto en mente, esta investigación investigó los efectos de la regulación emocional y la creatividad en el agotamiento de los profesores de EFL en clases en línea. Se planteó la hipótesis de que la creatividad y la capacidad de los maestros para regular sus emociones pueden minimizar la tasa de agotamiento. Para probar esta hipótesis, 329 profesores chinos de EFL fueron invitados a responder a tres cuestionarios validados. Los datos recogidos se analizaron mediante modelado de ecuaciones estructurales (SEM). Los resultados del estudio revelaron una correlación significativa entre la creatividad de los maestros chinos de EFL, la regulación de las emociones y el agotamiento. Los resultados también mostraron que la creatividad y la regulación emocional pueden hacer un cambio significativo en la tasa de agotamiento del profesor. Se espera que estos resultados sean iluminadores para todos los profesores de inglés online.

**Palabras clave:** agotamiento por agotamiento, Regulación de las emociones, creatividad, Profesores de EFL, Aulas en línea, China

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Because of its emotional nature, teaching is typically noted as a stressful and demanding career (Derakhshan & Nazari, 2022; MacIntyre, *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2022). Since the spread of the Coronavirus, the mode of instruction has shifted from face-to-face to online instruction, which made teaching a more demanding and challenging vocation (Derakhshan, Kruk, *et al.*, 2021b; Pawlak *et al.*, 2021). Online instruction needs familiarity with virtual education platforms and new teaching techniques (Lumapenet & Usop, 2022). Yet, most of the instructors are trained for face-to-face or traditional teaching and do not have sufficient knowledge of innovative teaching methods (Tao & Gao, 2022; Yüce, 2022). Inadequate information regarding online instruction alongside the typical demands of the teaching profession will drastically enhance the rate of teacher burnout (Fathi & Saeedian, 2020). Burnout can be related to an emptiness feeling originating from job-related stressors, work overload, and work pressure (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). According to Maslach *et al.* (2001), burnout is a syndrome attributed to feelings such as disinterest, weariness, and a low level of performance. Maslach (1983, p. 3) believes that burnout can be seen among people “who do people work” and conceptualizes it in three concepts: ‘emotional and physical exhaustion’, ‘reduced personal accomplishment, and ‘depersonalization’. Hence, as teachers have a higher amount of interaction with learners, it is likely to experience burnout (Frenzel & Stephens, 2013). In the case of continuance of this emotion, teachers’ enthusiasm for coping with daily professional hardships will melt away leading to low self-efficacy (Chang, 2009). With the negative consequences of teacher burnout in mind, many researchers (e.g., Bing *et al.*, 2022; Fathi *et al.*, 2021; Greenier *et al.*, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2022) have studied different sources of this phenomenon in face-to-face or traditional education environments. However, limited attention has been directed toward the causes of teacher burnout in online instructional contexts (Daniel & Van Bergen, 2023; Pressley & Ha, 2022; Shang, 2022). To address this gap, the current study intends to investigate the effects of creativity and emotion regulation on Chinese EFL teachers’ burnout in online classes.

The first factor that may negatively predict teacher burnout in online classrooms is creativity. It is a psychological construct with no agreed definition that is assumed to hinder or prevent burnout although its impact on and association with EFL teachers’ burnout has not been closely investigated and remained intact. This deficiency is probably due to the fuzzy nature of creativity and its psychological softness (Plucker *et al.*, 2004), which makes it difficult to describe. Research on the relationship between creativity and burnout level is few with diverse results. For example, Landeche (2009) found a non-significant correlation between public school teachers’ emotional burnout and their creativity. In another research on the relationship between teacher creativity and job burnout, Derakhshan, Greenier, *et al.* (2022) found a strong correlation between these two constructs.

Another negative predictor of teacher burnout in virtual courses is emotion regulation. The concept of emotion regulation generally pertains to “various cognitive, physiological, and behavioral processes that a person employs to regulate his/her emotional expressions and experiences” (Gross & John, 2003, p. 349). Teachers typically undergo various feelings in

educational settings: joy when a weak learner fully understands a complicated term, satisfaction when a learner selects the correct item, happiness when a learner actively participates in learning tasks, and disappointment when they witness a learner's academic reluctance (Xie, 2021). Teachers who can successfully regulate these feelings can establish friendly relationships with their learners and lead them toward higher academic grades (Derakhshan *et al.*, 2023; Dewaele & Li, 2020). On the other hand, teachers who fail to manage their emotions cannot help their learners to attain higher academic outcomes (Wang & Hall, 2021), which makes them feel stressed and used up (Fathi & Derakhshan, 2019).

Due to the important role of teacher creativity and emotion regulation in educational environments, noticeable attention has been paid to the consequences of these two variables. That is, several scholars (e.g., Fan & Wang, 2022; Solhi *et al.*, 2023; Valente *et al.*, 2022, among others) worldwide have studied the potential impacts of teacher creativity and emotion regulation in language education contexts. Yet, the effects of these constructs on language teachers' burnout have remained in the shadows. That is, few studies (Bing *et al.*, 2022; Chang, 2020; Fathi *et al.*, 2021; Xie, 2021) have been performed to evaluate the impacts of creativity and emotion regulation on language teachers' burnout. Furthermore, the extent to which language teachers' creativity and emotion regulation can affect their burnout in online courses is unclear. To answer these gaps, this inquiry plans to assess the effects of Chinese teachers' creativity and emotion regulation on their burnout in online English classes. The following research questions will guide the current investigation:

1. Is there any significant association between Chinese EFL teachers' emotion regulation, creativity, and burnout in online classes?
2. To what extent does Chinese EFL teachers' creativity predict their burnout in online classes?
3. To what extent does Chinese EFL teachers' ability to regulate their emotions predict their burnout in online classes?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Emotion Regulation (ER)

Emerging in the mid-1990s, emotion regulation is regarded as one of the principal topics in psychology. It seems that the definition of emotion and emotion regulation is a source of debate. Different scholars have abstracted and defined emotion and its regulation in different ways. Gross (2015, p. 3) points to the difficulty of the conceptualization of emotion and holds that explaining "what motions are *not* (e.g., not stress responses, not moods) turns out to be a lot easier than saying what emotions *are*." This hardship is due to the existence of various ways of conceptualizing emotions (Gross & Barrett, 2011). Gross (2015) divides emotions into two groups: helpful emotions and harmful emotions. Those emotions are considered helpful which appropriately channel sensory processing, offer data concerning the best proceeding method, enrich the decision-making process, provide us with information about other individuals' behavioral aims, and motivate publicly suitable behaviors (Fridlund, 1994; Schwarz & Clore, 1983; Susskind *et al.*, 2008). On the other hand, harmful emotions

are frequent, wrongly intensive, and durable, and sometimes lead to a maladaptive bias in behavior and cognition (Gross & Jazaieri, 2014). Although emotions are not permanent and come and go, we can often try to control them to some extent particularly when a special emotion may influence our defined goal (Derakhshan & Zare, 2023).

As mentioned above, there is no consensus on the conceptualization of emotion regulation. For instance, Cole *et al.* (1994) define emotion regulation as an individual's ability to respond and take action to the current experience with emotional pressures in a flexible and socially tolerable way. Thompson *et al.* (2008) see emotion regulation as two types of mechanisms, internal and external, through which people can evaluate, manage, and modify their emotions to reach their goals. Different models have been proposed in defining and characterizing the emotion regulation concept; among which the model of Metcalfe and Mischel (1999) called the *Hot/Cool System Model* is considered here since it is known as the comprehensive one. In this model, the concept of emotion regulation includes a cool and hot system. According to Sutton and Harper (2009, p. 391), the cool system is "cognitive, complex, slow, contemplative, and emotionally neutral" with intrinsically interconnected *cool nodes*. These cool nodes are the origin of strategic, reflective, and rational behaviors. On the other side of the coin, there is the hot system with some *hot buttons or spots* paving the way for fast and sometimes unreasonable emotion processing. Sutton *et al.* (2009) maintain that teachers with the ability of effective emotion regulation alter their hot spots to cool nodes by overlooking the incentive or interpreting the stimulus in a distinctive way. Gross (1998) believes that the aim of generally used strategies for emotion regulation by teachers is establishing a constructive relationship with students and colleagues and representing themselves in the best way. Two commonly used emotion regulation strategies by instructors are cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. As an antecedent-focused, cognitive reappraisal strategy which is a type of cognitive modification, individuals try to down-regulate unpleasant emotions. As a response-focused strategy, expressive suppression appears later in the process of emotion production to bring to a halt current emotional behavior (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). As research has shown, people who use cognitive reappraisal strategy are likely to express and go under fewer negative and unpleasant emotions and experience more positive emotions; have the ability to negotiate and interpret stressful conditions effectively by being optimistic and positive (Fathi *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, these individuals have better well-being conditions and are successful in their interpersonal performance besides being more satisfied. As mentioned, the connection between emotion regulation and EFL teacher burnout, particularly in online classes has received little attention. Nevertheless, emotion regulation has attracted more attention in recent studies and only a few studies investigated the relationship between emotion regulation and burnout and they all were in-person classes (e.g., Chang, 2020; Fathi *et al.*, 2021; Xie, 2021) and the role of emotion regulation in online classes in the Chinese EFL context remained obscurity.

## 2.2. Creativity

Creativity is another factor to consider in the present study which is difficult to elaborate. One of the basic questions in creativity research is understanding the 'creative' and 'creativity' concepts (Simonton, 2014). In spite of being a psychological construct, the notion

of creativity has been referred to in different ways but without any consensus. In general, it is explained as an ability, process, or activity to innovate something including an object, idea, or method (Newton & Beverton, 2012). Banaji *et al.* (2010, p.4) define a creative person as an individual who queries, makes connections, reflects on problems critically, and solves them innovatively. According to Cremin (2015), a creative process is a new way of imagining, thinking, and searching for possibilities. Fleming (2012) characterizes creativity as imagination and play, freedom, and originality and believes that creative people do not follow tradition, wisdom, and rules.

Creativity is valued in all domains of life including education, and is not limited to a specific area like science (Baer & Kaufman, 2012). Piaget believes that the primary goal of education is promoting creativity and nurturing creative individuals (Fisher, 2005). Improving learners' motivation, self-esteem, social skills, and success are advantages of creative thinking in the classroom (Derakhshan *et al.*, 2021a). In this fast-changing world, being creative help students to be adaptable and flexible, cope with new situations and daily problems, and search for new ways to succeed in their future life (Newton & Beverton, 2012). Accordingly, most policy documents urge education stakeholders to promote creativity in education and several strategies and approaches have been proposed to foster creative thinking in class (Fisher, 2005). NACCCE (1999) defines two types of creative teaching: teaching creatively and teaching for creativity. The former refers to the exploration of innovative teaching methods and procedures to motivate students and stimulate their interests while the latter is related to types of teaching methods with the intention of developing learners' creative behavior and thinking leading to engagement in learning (Jeffrey & Craft, 2004). Lin (2011) believes that both notions are interconnected and demanded to have a creativity-developing context. Although both teachings for creativity and creative teaching are related to teachers, it seems that there is research scarcity on the creativity of teachers and its effect on their teaching practices and students' success, particularly in the EFL context.

In English language classes, the opportunity for creativity is described as freedom in the selection and application of knowledge, active engagement in learning, and critical reflection on the learning experience (Cremin, 2015). Read (2015), considers creativity-cultivating approaches probably similar among subjects including English as a foreign language, which includes asking engaging questions, providing more options for learners, and planning skills to investigate distinctive ideas. Read (2015, p. 89) describes EFL classrooms as 'a nest of creativity' in which students have the opportunity to experience joyful and rewarding learning through using the new language and involvement in creative activities motivating them to take risks. For teachers, it is essential to identify creativity and its features to be able to search for opportunities to enhance creative thinking without considering discipline (Newton & Waugh, 2012, Yüce *et al.*, 2023). Wang and Kokotsaki (2018) studied Chinese EFL teachers' perceptions of creativity. They found that most teachers besides appraising creativity, considered creativity fostering thoughts crucial for personal development and efficient language learning. According to this study, from a Chinese EFL teacher's perspective, creativity included four aspects: creative products, freedom of choice and expression, cognitive development, and creative teaching approaches. They regarded taking advantage of playful activities and art forms and providing a simulative atmosphere in class for innovative ideas as preferred approaches.

### 2.3. Burnout

Burnout, as a serious disorder or syndrome, is usual in those professions including interactions, person-to-person, and teaching is among those careers. The currently proposed definitions for burnout are varied and diverse. However, the most widely accepted and cited definition is Maslach's elaboration. Maslach *et al.* (2001) define burnout as a multifaceted syndrome including negative emotions such as apathy, fatigue, and reduced performance. Burnout is identified with three dimensions: dissatisfaction with their work which happens gradually, depersonalization (losing a normal sense of reality and personal identity and adopting an increasingly negative perspective toward others), and emotional exhaustion (Maslach *et al.* 1996). Maslach and Leiter (2016) considering it a job-related threat hold that burnout is associated with a psychological condition developed as a lasting reaction to work-related stressors. A study by McCormick and Barnett (2011) showed that teachers who suffered from depersonalization burnout started getting skeptical and pessimistic perspectives toward their work, themselves, and their students.

It is worth noting that burnout and stress are two distinctive concepts in many aspects. Anxiety disorders caused by stress create urgency and over-reactive emotions (Wang *et al.*, 2015). An individual who suffers from anxiety disorders is usually over-engaged in their work; however, burnout is characterized by depression and disinterest producing hopelessness along with emotional damage. Individuals suffering from burnout had lost their motivation, hopes, ideals, and interests, and are emotionally bunted and as a result, disengaged in their jobs (Wang *et al.*, 2015). Like burnout in other professions, teacher burnout has been investigated in recent years. These studies provided evidence that burnout is influenced by several factors, organizational or individual, such as pedagogical barriers, workload, student misbehavior (Domenech & Gomez, 2010), unpleasant feelings formed by emotional intelligence, and personality type, self-esteem, classroom environment, and work pressure (Dorman, 2003), students' perceived misbehavior (Change, 2009), disrespect (Hastings & Bham, 2003), and self-efficacy (Skaalvic & Skaalvic, 2010).

In the same vein, EFL teachers' burnout has been under debate in recent years. EFL teaching is complicated by great challenges and hardships increasing the probability of teacher burnout and attrition (Acheson *et al.*, 2016, Derakhshan, Eslami, *et al.*, 2022). Since EFL teachers need to deal with potential hardships concerning emotional and cultural challenges in language education, L2 scholars assert that language teachers are highly susceptible to burnout compared to other educators. According to Acheson *et al.* (2016), the proportion of attrition among foreign language teachers is higher than among instructors in other fields which justifies additional empirical research on burnout and the effective factors in the foreign language teaching context (Zhu *et al.*, 2018). To cite a few studies in the EFL context, Loh and Liew (2016) found that factors such as tensions, emotional burdens, and hardships concerning teaching English are largely due to the value-laden content of the subject, the need for being culturally responsive, grading stress of essays, pressures from testing in high-stake levels. In another study, Ghanizadeh and Royaei (2015) indicated a dynamic association between burnout, emotion regulation, and emotional labor strategies. As it is seen, different factors play a role in the teachers' experience of burnout. Two potential factors are creativity (Derakhshan, Greenier, *et al.*, 2022) and emotion regulation (Chang,

2020). The present study is an attempt to further study these factors in the EFL context but this time in online classes.

### 3. METHOD

The present study was carried out by adopting a quantitative survey design employing a questionnaire with four sections including participants' demographic information, and three variables of the study i.e., burnout, creativity, and emotion regulation

#### 3.1. Participants

The questionnaire was administered to 329 Chinese EFL instructors, teaching in language institutes and schools of which 326 questionnaires were valid. The participants, selected by taking advantage of a convenient sampling method, had various academic degrees including high school (23.4%), bachelor's (45.5), master's (24.32 %), and other degrees (3.65%). To increase the generalizability of the results, the participants comprised both genders (98 males, 29.79 %, and 326 females, 70.21%) from different majors including English Language and Literature, Translation, Business English, and English Teaching. All the participants had the experience of teaching in online classes both during COVID-19 and even after that.

#### 3.2. Instruments

To carry out the present study, a questionnaire involving Likert-type items with four separate parts was administered. The first section collected data on participants' age, gender, teaching experience, hours of online teaching in a week, academic qualification, and major. The second part concerned teachers' creativity. Teaching for Creativity Scale (TCS) with 41 items (DaVia Rubenstein, *et al.*, 2013). According to the developers of TCS, it has a good fit for data (CMIN/df = 1.819) and TLI rho<sup>2</sup>=0.917. The scale included 41 items with seven subscales, from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7). The next part of the instrument was the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003) with two subsections, reappraisal factor (6 items) and suppression factors (4 items), and estimating with seven subscales of agreement or disagreement. The last section of the questionnaire was the teacher version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-ES), developed by Maslach *et al.*, (1996), including 23 items rating teachers' burnout by a 7-point scale from never (1) to always (7) with the Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.85.

#### 3.3. Data Collection Procedure

The required data for the present study were collected in two months starting from 2023.2.10. A self-report Likert-type questionnaire including items on emotion regulation, creativity, and burnout was administered in online style using WhatsApp and WeChat. Prior to the completion of the questionnaire, participants are informed about the objectives and probable risks of the study and they are assured of their right to withdraw from the study,

the animosity of their information, and the use of their information only for research purposes. They are asked to sign the consent form and submit it online. In order to avoid the possibility of misunderstanding or ambiguity, the questionnaire was converted to Chinese by to translation experts and then the reverse translation was carried out. The validity of the questionnaire was controlled by two experts. After collecting the questionnaires, they were checked reading their validity for use in the data analysis step.

#### 4. RESULTS

The collected data were analyzed on the basis of the following hypotheses:

**NH1:** EFL teachers’ emotional regulation does not predict teachers’ burnout in online classes.

**NH2:** EFL Teachers’ creativity does not predict teachers’ burnout in online classes.

**NH3:** EFL teachers’ emotional regulation does not predict their creativity.

In Table 1, the result indicated that five determiners are the ratio of CMIN-DF, goodness-of-fit index (GFI), normed fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The model fit indices are all within specifications. Therefore, CMIN/DF is 2.643 (spec.  $\leq 3.0$ ), GFI = 0.728 (spec.  $> 0.9$ ), NFI = 0.625 (spec.  $> 0.9$ ), CFI = .727 (spec.  $> 0.9$ ), and RMSEA = 0.071 (spec.  $< 0.080$ ).

**Table 1.** *The Goodness of Fit Estimation*

Criteria		Threshold			Evaluation
		Terrible	Acceptable	Excellent	
CMIN	6721.152				
DF	2543				
CMIN/DF	2.643	> 5	> 3	> 1	Excellent
RMSEA	.071	> 0.08	< 0.08	< 0.06	Acceptable
CFI	.727	-	> 0.9	> 0.95	-
NFI	.625	-	> 0.9	> 0.95	-
GFI	.728	-	> 0.9	> 0.95	-



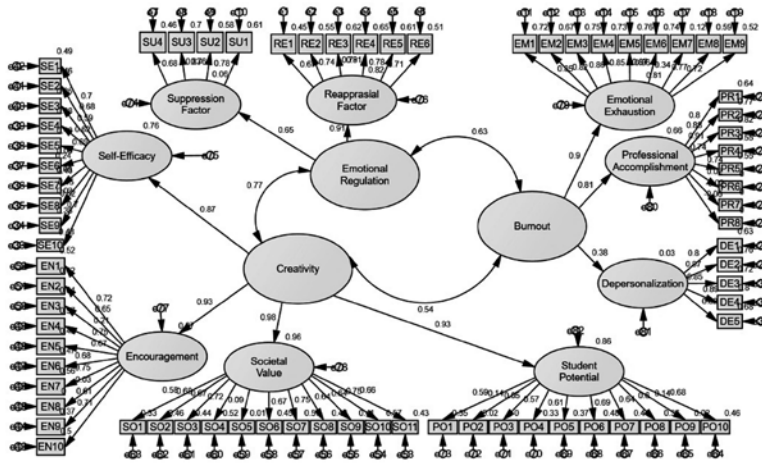


Figure 1. The Final Modified CFA Model with Standardized Estimates

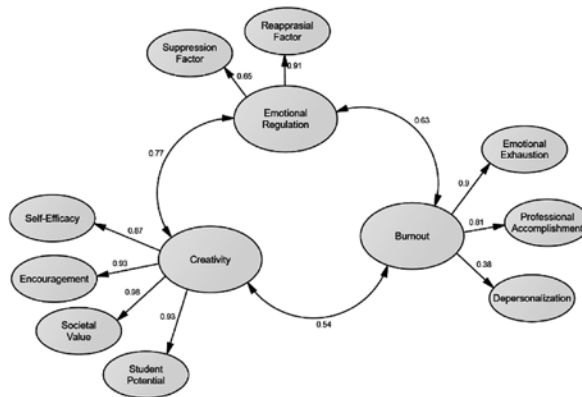


Figure 2. The Measurement Models

Table 2. Composite Reliability and Discriminant Validity of the Factors

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	CRE	EMOREG	BURN
Creativity	0.961	0.862	0.585	0.974	<b>0.928</b>		
Emotional Regulation	0.765	0.626	0.585	0.845	0.765	<b>0.791</b>	
Burnout	0.770	0.553	0.399	0.885	0.547	0.632	<b>0.743</b>

The results of Table 2 show that composite reliabilities of the factors are acceptable (CR > 0.70). In other words, the model has achieved composite reliability. The values also demonstrate that the convergent validity of the factors reaches an acceptable value (AVE

> 0.50) or the model has achieved convergent validity. Another requirement of convergent validity is factor loading more than 0.50. The results of factor loading are presented in Table 3. In addition, the results indicate that the model has achieved discriminant validity (the square root of AVE > inter-construct correlations).

**Table 3.** *Factor Loading and Standardized Regression Weights*

		Estimate
Reappraisal Factor	← Emotional Regulation	0.908
Suppression	← Emotional Regulation	0.654
Emotional Exhaustion	← Burnout	0.921
Professional Accomplishment	← Burnout	0.814
Depersonalization	← Burnout	0.383
Societal Values	← Creativity	0.978
Environmental Encouragement	← Creativity	0.931
Teacher Self-efficacy	← Creativity	0.873
Student Potential	← Creativity	0.929

The results of Table 3 show that almost all of the values are more than 0.50. It means that the model has achieved convergent validity.

**Table 4.** *The Prediction Power of Every Variable in Standardized Regression Weights*

		Estimate
Emotional Regulation	↔ Burnout	0.632
Creativity	↔ Emotion Regulation	0.765
Creativity	↔ Burnout	0.547

The results of Table 4 represent that all null hypotheses are rejected. It means that teachers’ emotional regulation predicts teachers’ burnout in online classes. The values indicate that about 63 percent of changes in burnout in online classes can be predicted by their emotional regulation; about 55 percent of changes in teachers’ burnout in online classes can be predicted by their creativity; 76 percent of changes in teachers’ emotional regulation can be predicted by their creativity

## 5. DISCUSSION

The primary aim of the present study is to consider the existence or lack of any interplay among Chinese EFL teachers’ creativity, emotional regulation, and burnout levels in online classes. Therefore, three null Hypotheses were formed and the related data were collected employing a Likert scale questionnaire. The results obtained from the SEM analysis showed an interplay among the variables of the study and all the generated null hypotheses were rejected.

Regarding the first null hypothesis i.e., lack of relationship between emotion regulation and EFL teachers’ burnout in online classes, the results showed that about 65% of the changes

in burnout level are due to teachers' emotion regulation capacity. This finding lends support to Gross's (2015) division of emotions into helpful and harmful ones. Burnout as a harmful emotion will be lowered if teachers are trained to control harmful feelings. On the basis of Metcalfe and Mischel's (1999) model of emotion regulation, teachers with the ability of effective emotion regulation find the power of altering their hot spots to cool nodes and consequently act strategically, reflectively, and show rational behaviors. This is consistent with the findings of Fathi *et al.* (2021) who showed that teachers with higher levels of emotional regulation strategies had lower levels of burnout in EFL classes. In other studies, Fathi *et al.* (2022) and Gahizadeh and Royaei (2015) showed a negative relationship between emotion regulation and teachers' burnout. As Gross and John (2003) point out teachers who benefit from higher capacities of emotion regulation can control their emotions efficiently and avoid emotional exhaustion. This outcome also supports the findings of Chang (2020), who found a close, negative relationship between Chinese teachers' emotion regulation and job burnout.

The second hypothesis was on the predictive power of creativity toward EFL teachers' burnout in online classes. The results indicated that teachers' creativity predicted 55% of their burnout changes and the null hypothesis was rejected. According to Gross (2015), creativity is one of the positive and helpful emotions that channels sensory processes, enriches the decision-making process, and motivates suitable behaviors. Therefore, the finding from the present work is supported by Gross (2015). Although very few, other studies on the relationship between creativity and burnout had somewhat different results. For example, a study by Schaufeli *et al.*, (1996) found empirical evidence on the association between burnout, creativity, and innovation. In fact, they found people with less creativity experience burnout. Landeche (2009) indicated that there is a connection between personal achievement and creativity but no relationship with burnout. Another study by Ghonsooly and Raessi (2012) on the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' creativity and burnout showed a weak correlation between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, two subscales of burnout, but a reasonably significant relationship with reduced personal achievements. It is postulated that creative teachers have the ability to generate new ideas and innovative ways to cope with the stress and hardships of online teaching and overcome the confronted challenges. This result is also in agreement with Greenier *et al.*'s (2021) outcome, which indicated that teacher creativity is negatively connected to disengagement.

On the relationship between emotion regulation and teachers' creativity, i.e., the third hypothesis, the results showed a positive correlation. EFL teachers' creativity predicted 76% of their emotion regulation. This finding can be explained both by Metcalfe and Mischel's (1999) model of emotion regulation and emotion division of Gross (2015). Creativity is naturally a helpful and constructive emotion and can be enhanced by cool nodes of emotion regulation. This outcome lends support to the results of Greenier *et al.* (2021), who discovered a strong, desirable relationship between teacher creativity and emotion regulation. It is assumed that it is the ability to create innovative ways and new ideas that help teachers perceive different ways of overcoming EFL context challenges and regulate their emotions. As Valente *et al.* (2023) point out creative teachers usually integrate and compose emotion regulation strategies to handle classroom conflicts and challenges.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The finding of this study, which was an indication of an interplay among EFL teachers' creativity, emotion regulation, and burnout in inline classes, may provide several implications for language education stakeholders including institute principles, syllabus designers as well as English teachers. Regarding the significance of teachers' emotional regulation in lessening teacher burnout, language teacher educators need to take practical steps to enhance teachers' emotional regulation strategies, as these strategies can contribute to reducing teachers' depersonalization and emotional exhaustion. Khani and Mirzaee (2015) argue that helping teachers to improve their professionalism can reduce the likelihood of experiencing burnout. Further, the EFL teacher training program should give more attention to burnout since feeling burnout by EFL teachers may lead them to get less engaged in their work, detached from teaching, feel fatigued, used up, and finally inappropriately affect this perception of their learners. Consequently, one of the primary purposes of teacher education from developing EFL teachers' skills in China.

Consequently, EFL teachers' education programs in China should provide EFL teachers with the necessary through organizing workshops skills to improve teachers' emotional regulation strategies and their creativity in general and in online classes. For example, teachers may be introduced to situations with different technological problems or students' disinterest in learning activities in online classes, and teachers with training on what they can do in such situations. Foreign language teachers' educators in China need to reevaluate the pre-service teacher's creativity to ensure a prerequisite level of creativity for entering into the profession. On the other hand, it is recommended that ELF teachers exploit their potential to control their emotions and show creativity to protect themselves from being burnt out.

Concerning the limitations, the present study is limited by a number of factors. Firstly, as is mentioned in the methodology, the data of the present study is from the Chinese EFL context, therefore, generalizing the present findings to other EFL contexts and teachers should be done with caution. The replication of the present study in a different context is suggested for future studies. Another limitation is related to the design of the study which was a questionnaire; in order to reach more accurate data and reliable findings, it is recommended that future studies employ interview methods to take advantage of mixed methods to enrich generalizability. This study was a one-shot design, future studies can employ a longitudinal design to monitor the probable changes in the teachers' traits over time.

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